

Union ratifies agreement with LAUSD, teachers to take up to 10 unpaid furlough days next year

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Los Angeles Unified's teachers union has ratified an agreement to take up to 10 unpaid furlough days next year to save the jobs of 4,700 educators and restore some Adult Education, preschool and English-learner programs that had been threatened with elimination, officials said Saturday.

The announcement capped three days of voting at schools around the 700-square-mile district, and some officials had privately expressed concern that United Teachers Los Angeles would reject the contract. In the end however, the vote was 58 to 42 percent in favor, with about 24,400 of 36,000 eligible members casting ballots.

The agreement had already been adopted last Tuesday by the Los Angeles Unified board. Most of the other unions in LAUSD have already agreed to take 10 furlough days.

UTLA President Warren Fletcher released a statement that underscored what was at stake as the union weighed its options.

"As today's very close ratification vote demonstrates, teachers have begun to worry - justifiably - that by sacrificing and putting the needs of our students and our communities first, we educators are enabling the school board and the superintendent to continue year after year to eliminate dedicated teachers, to shorten the school year for every student, and to further undercut the value of an LAUSD education. This vote puts the superintendent and school board on notice."

In an interview, Superintendent John Deasy said he was very thankful the union membership had ratified the deal, thus saving thousands of jobs and some of the district's most popular programs.

"Students are very lucky to have these teachers, these administrators, these nurses and librarians and counselors," he said. "It shows that our people are willing to do what California won't."

Both Fletcher and Deasy said it is vital that voters approve a sales tax hike that Gov. Jerry Brown wants to put on the November ballot to boost funding for California's public schools. It calls for a quarter-percent hike in the sales tax, as well as a higher income tax rate for the state's highest earners. Brown has said he would have to shorten the 2012-13 school year by three weeks if voters reject the tax hike.

If voters approve the increase, however, the district may be able to reduce the number of furlough days imposed on employees. In addition, the agreement mandates that LAUSD must use any year-end surplus to reduce the number of furlough days.

With the contract ratified, the district can now begin rescinding more than 4,700 of the pink slips that had been sent out in March. Among those whose jobs will be saved are elementary arts and continuation high school teachers, along with nurses, librarians and high school counselors. The district will also be able to cancel its plans to increase class K-8 class sizes - some as much as 25 percent - which also will result in job restorations.

Although the district will be able to save its Adult and Early Childhood Education and School Readiness Language Development programs, not all of the classes will survive and some employees will lose their jobs on June 30.

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